

Things That Are Better

Which is better: Death or birth? Mourning or feasting? Sorrow or laughter? Rebuking or singing? The end or the beginning? Patience or pride?

Ecclesiastes 7.1–14

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Scripture Reader and Reading: Wayne Duncan – Ecclesiastes 6.10–12

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Larry Amberg – Songs on Rejoicing

Prelude:

I. Is it always better to be happy than sad?

- A. We know the benefits of being happy, but
- B. is it possible that there could be benefits to being sad?
 - 1. Why did God create us with the ability to feel sadness?
 - 2. Think with Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and
 - a) I think you will agree with what he says about sadness, for
 - b) you have often experienced what he wrote here.

II. Have you been sad before and

- A. either you felt guilty or
- B. someone made you feel guilty, but
 - 1. you believed you had good reason for being sad?
 - 2. Was it wrong to be sad?

III. Let us hear the wisdom of Solomon—

- A. which is truly the wisdom of the Holy Spirit—
- B. as he makes a series of comparisons,
 - 1. showing us truth that we may not have considered before.

Persuasion:

I. Ecclesiastes 7.1–4 • The House of Mourning

- 1 A good name is better than precious ointment,
And the day of death than the day of one's birth;**
- 2 Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,**

**For that is the end of all men;
And the living will take it to heart.**

- 3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.**
- 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.**

A. The First Comparison: A good name is better than precious ointment.

1. Precious ointment is valuable and pleasant.
2. However, a good name is far more valuable and pleasant.
 - a) Precious ointment does not satisfy the soul and
 - b) does not make us better people.
 - (1) However, a good name satisfies the soul, and
 - (2) shows our value.

B. The Second Comparison: The day of death is better than the day of birth.

1. The day of one's birth is a time of happiness and rejoicing.
2. Yet, the day of death is truly better than the day of birth.
 - a) Birth introduces us to a world of misery, but
 - b) death introduces us to the peace of heaven.
3. Ecclesiastes 3 says that there is a time and a purpose for birth and death.
 - a) As we go through the stages of development,
 - b) so we must go through death to reach God.

**1 To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
2 A time to be born,
And a time to die...**

– Ecclesiastes 3.1–2a

C. The Third Comparison: It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go the house of feasting.

1. Is going to the house of feasting a good thing?
 - a) It can be.
 - b) The older brother, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15),
 - (1) should have gone to the house of feasting
 - (2) when his younger brother returned.
2. Yet, there is a time to go to the house of mourning.
 - a) That is not a bad thing, because
 - b) it makes us take it to heart.
 - (1) The death of a loved one makes us think about our lives.
 - (2) We typically do not do that in the house of feasting.

3. Again, remember Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 3,

**1 To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven...**

**4b A time to mourn,
And a time to dance...**

– Ecclesiastes 3.1, 4b

4. I know people who have been converted at the house of mourning, but
 - a) I cannot recall any converted at the house of feasting.
 - b) We usually think when somber,
 - (1) not when rejoicing.

D. The Fourth Comparison: Sorrow is better than laughter.

1. Shall we not laugh?
 - a) You know that laughter is good and
 - b) Solomon does not say it is bad.
 - (1) Solomon himself had written,

**1 To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven...**

**4a A time to weep,
And a time to laugh...**

– Ecclesiastes 3.1, 4a

**22 A merry heart does good, like medicine,
But a broken spirit dries the bones.**

– Proverbs 17.22

2. Yet, a sad countenance can make the heart better.
 - a) Do not judge someone with a sad countenance.
 - b) The wise know that sadness can make the heart better.
3. Therefore, expect
 - a) to see the heart of the wise in the house of mourning and
 - b) to see the heart of fools in the house of mirth.
 - (1) The wise wants to improve himself.
 - (2) The fool cares not for self-improvement.

II. Ecclesiastes 7.5–7 • The Rebuke of the Wise

**5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
Than for a man to hear the song of fools.**

**6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,
So is the laughter of the fool.
This also is vanity.**

**7 Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason,
And a bribe debases the heart.**

A. The Fifth Comparison: It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

1. The wise tell us what we need to hear.

2. The fool sings what he wants to hear.
- B. The laughter of the fool is like the crackling of thorns under a pot.
1. It makes plenty of noise but
 2. does not generate enough heat to boil water.
 - a) The fool makes plenty of sound, but
 - b) does not help anyone.
- C. Solomon said everything positive about the wise man, but
1. oppression can ruin his reason.
 2. If he receives a bribe (v 7),
 - a) it can debase his heart.

III. Ecclesiastes 7.8–10 • The End of a Thing

- 8 The end of a thing is better than its beginning;
The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.**
- 9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,
For anger rests in the bosom of fools.**
- 10 Do not say,
“Why were the former days better than these?”
For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.**

- A. The Sixth Comparison: The end of a thing is better than its beginning.
1. When one project ends,
 2. it opens the door for another project.
 - a) Much stress goes into the beginning of a thing, but
 - b) with the end of it there is relief.
- B. The Seventh Comparison: The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
1. The patient gain much through gentle waiting.
 2. The proud loses much through rude demands.
 - a) People bless the patient.

- b) People resist the proud;
 - (1) their anger turns people off.
- C. The Eighth Comparison: The good old days are not necessarily better than today.
 - 1. If we ask why yesterday was better than today,
 - 2. we do not inquire wisely in that matter.
 - a) Were there good things in the past that we wish existed today? Yes!
 - b) Are there bad things today that did not exist yesteryear? Yes!
 - (1) Were there bad things in the good old days
 - (2) that we are glad do not exist today? Yes!
 - (a) Are there good things today
 - (b) that we wish had existed in the past? Yes!
 - 3. Why wish to live yesterday when we cannot do it?
 - a) What Jesus said about the future
 - b) we can say about the past,

34 “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

– Matthew 6.34

- (1) Do not worry about tomorrow, because
- (2) we have enough problems today.
 - (a) Do not gloat about yesterday, because
 - (b) we have enough good today.

IV. Ecclesiastes 7.11–12 • Wisdom and an Inheritance

**11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
And profitable to those who see the sun.**

**12 For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense,
But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have**

it.

A. The Ninth Comparison: Wisdom is better than money.

1. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, but
2. foolishness with an inheritance is bad.
 - a) Sudden wealth has ruined many people, or rather
 - b) it was not the sudden wealth,
 - (1) it was the foolish heart.
 - (2) Others have received wealth, but
 - (a) it made them better, but
 - (b) it was not the wealth, rather
 - i) the wealth gave them more opportunities
 - ii) to show their wisdom.
3. Therefore, let us first learn wisdom, then
 - a) how to earn money.
 - b) He who has wisdom and wealth
 - (1) can be profitable to those who see the sun.

B. Money is a defense.

1. Money helps us.
2. We need money.

C. However,

1. money does not give true life,
2. wisdom does.

V. Ecclesiastes 7.13–14 • Prosperity and Adversity

13 Consider the work of God;

For who can make straight what He has made crooked?

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful,

**But in the day of adversity consider:
Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other,
So that man can find out nothing that will come after him.**

- A. Think on the work of God.
 - 1. Can anyone make straight what he has made crooked, or
 - 2. can anyone make crooked what he has made straight?
- B. Let us learn to deal with all kinds of days.
 - 1. When it is a prosperous day,
 - 2. be joyful.
 - a) When it is an adverse day,
 - b) consider.
 - (1) What are we to consider?
 - (2) God has appointed to bring one kind of day as well as the other.
 - 3. Why does God do that?
 - a) He does not want man to find out anything that will come after him.
 - b) He does not want man to have faith in tomorrow, but to trust him.
 - (1) He does not want us to assume that if today was good
 - (2) everyday will be good.
 - (a) He does not want us to assume that if today was bad
 - (b) everyday will be bad.

Exhortation:

I. From Solomon's wisdom we learn: Wise is the man and woman who know

- A. the value of a good name,
- B. the value of the day of death,
- C. when to go to the house of mourning,
- D. when to sorrow,

- E. when to hear rebuke,
- F. when to end a thing,
- G. how to be patient rather than angry,
- H. how to have wisdom,
- I. how to consider the work of God,
- J. how to rejoice in the day of prosperity, and
- K. how to consider in the day of adversity.

1. The wise person knows

- a) when to be up and
 - b) when to be down.
2. If you are not a faithful Christian, be down.
3. If you are a faithful Christian, be up.

II. Here is how to become a Christian...

- A. Be down, because you are not one.
- B. Be up, because there is a way to be one.